



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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May 9, 2017

To The Honorable Charles Schwertner, Chair, The Honorable Carlos Uresti, Vice Chair, and The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services:

I write today to express my support for House Bill 1486, which will provide a defined scope of services for certified peer specialists, necessary to seek reimbursement from the Medicaid program. Passage of House Bill 1486 will expand access to these services, providing another resource in addressing behavioral health for Houston residents.

Earlier this year, I unveiled my comprehensive plan to address homelessness in Houston. Behavioral health, including substance use, is a significant factor in homelessness. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a quarter of the U.S. homeless population suffers from a severe mental illness, 38 percent suffer from alcohol dependence and 26 percent from dependence on other substances. Our ability to make meaningful change in the lives of people experiencing homelessness hinges on our ability to provide the services they need to make that change.

Peer specialists are people with certain lived experience who have sufficient training to act as behavioral health professionals. They are able to reach people in ways that can be particularly effective for many individuals. House Bill 1486 will provide the framework for these professionals to receive certification. With certification, their services can be reimbursable under the Medicaid program.

I ask for your support on House Bill 1486. Please make certified peer specialists another option for people suffering from behavioral health issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston